



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY SEMINAR
“COACHES: EDUCATING PEOPLE”**

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal
Stanisław Rylko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

I address my cordial greeting to you and to all those attending the International Seminar to study the theme “Coaches: educators of people”, organized by the Church and Sport section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. By following your journey of reflection and promotion of human and Christian values of sports, in this fourth Seminar you have opportunely taken into consideration the figure of the coach, placing emphasis on his or her role as educator, both in the professional or amateur sphere.

All of us, in life, need educators, mature, wise and balanced people who help us to grow in the family, in our studies, in work and in faith. Educators who encourage us to take the first steps in a new activity without being afraid of the obstacles and challenges to be faced; who spur us to overcome difficult moments; who exhort us to have trust in ourselves and in our teammates; who are beside us both in times of disappointment and of failure, and in those of joy and success. Indeed, the athletic coach too, especially in the Catholic environment of amateur sport, can become for so many kids and young people, very important for the development of a mature, harmonious and complete person.

The presence of a good educator-coach is providentially revealed especially in the years of adolescence and early youth, when the personality is actively developing and seeking models to refer to and identify with; when one strongly feels a need for the appreciation and esteem not only of one’s peers but also of adults; when, in following bad examples and in seeking false happiness, the danger of floundering is increasingly real. In this delicate phase of life, great responsibility lies with a coach, who often has the privilege of spending hours a week with young people and of

having great influence on them through his or her behaviour and personality. The influence of educators, especially on young people, depends more on who they are as persons and on how they live than on what they say. Thus, how important it is for a coach to be an example of integrity, coherence, of right judgement and impartiality, but also of *joie de vivre*, patience, capacity for respect, and of benevolence toward everyone, especially the most disadvantaged! How important it is for a coach to be an example of faith! Indeed, faith always helps us to lift our gaze to God, so as not to absolutize our activities, including sports, be they amateur or competitive, and therefore to have the right objectivity and the wisdom to relativize both defeats and successes. Faith gives us that gaze of goodness on others, which enables us to overcome the temptation of excessive rivalry and aggression, makes us understand the dignity of each person, even of the less gifted and disadvantaged. Coaches, in this sense, can make such a valuable contribution to the creation of a climate of solidarity and inclusion with regard to young people who are marginalized and at risk for social reasons, finding the appropriate ways and means to draw them too to participate in sport and to experiences of socialization. A coach with human and spiritual balance will also know how to preserve the authentic values of a sport and its fundamental nature as a game and as a socializing activity, preventing it from degenerating under the increasingly intrusive pressure from so many interests today, especially economic.

Next to parents, teachers, priests and catechists, a coach can therefore be an effective formator of young people. Every good formator must receive a solid formation. It is necessary to form formators. That is why it is important that your seminar recall all the organizations operating in the field of sport, national and international federations, lay and ecclesial athletic associations, to pay due attention and to invest the necessary resources for the professional, human and spiritual formation of coaches. How beautiful it would be if in all sports, and at all levels, from large international competitions to the tournaments in parish recreation centres, young people could encounter in their coaches authentic witnesses of life and of faith lived!

I pray the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, that your work in these days may bear abundant fruit for the pastoral care of sport, and that it continue to promote Christian holiness in this environment too, in which so many young lives can be reached and transformed by joyous witnesses of the Gospel. I ask you to please pray for me, and with affection I bless you.

*From the Vatican, 14 May 2015
Feast of St Matthias the Apostle*

Francis

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